# *NED COX REMEMBERS:*

## *An Autobiography*

# *NED COX REMEMBERS: An Autobiography*

*Pat and Ned Cox*
*Kentucky School for the Blind*
*Paul J. Langen Award, 10 May 1993*

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A suggested donation of three dollars or more is invited. All proceeds, after expenses, will go to the Ned Cox Student Fund, Kentucky School for the Blind. Send donation to Ned Cox Student Fund, c/o Cathy Cody, 4001 Dover Place, St. Louis, Missouri, 63116-3239.

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DEDICATION

This story is dedicated to my wife, Pat Cox, who has been partner, love of my life, helpmeet and friend for 51 years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I want to thank two people who helped make this story possible—Marian Ziebell for transcribing and editing the tape, and Norma S. Nichols for proof-reading the material.

C.E.C. February 1994

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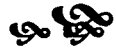
I haven't written anything down so this is going to be stream of consciousness on the tape recorder. If you can make head nor tails of it, more power to you.



**Family Of Origin**

I was born November the 15th, 1916, in Chicago, Illinois, the youngest of five children. My brother Jim was the oldest. Then came Dorothy, Mildred, Jean, and myself. I remember the snow drifts in Chicago. Dad had to shovel a tunnel from the street to the front door. He was a quiet person, hard-working, and devoted to the family. We moved to Cincinnati in 1922.

**Injury**

The next year, when I was seven and attending second grade at St. Andrew's Catholic Elementary School, a boy injured my right eye with a stick. Of course my parents took me to an eye doctor. Dr. Lamb, in Cincinnati, examined the eye and removed a small splinter from the eyebrow. He thought it would be all right.

Over the next six months the eye that had been injured became infected. A cataract formed, and sympathetic ophthalmia, as it's called, crossed over to the left, good eye. After about six months from the original time of injury the doctor put me in the hospital and removed the injured eye. However, it was too late. The cataract that formed on the left eye never ripened so that it could be removed. In those days, in the 1920's, doctors weren't aware of the danger of the good eye being infected through the optic nerve of the injured eye.

I spent nine months during 1923 in the Children's Hospital in Cincinnati. I had to stay in bed in a room darkened by black cheesecloth over the window, trying to save my good eye. This was to no avail.

While I was in the hospital my dad built a new home in Park Hills, Kentucky, just south of Covington, and near

my mother's father's farm. We moved into the house when I came home from the hospital in 1924. Dad ran a filling station there.

I had quite an adjustment to make, learning to walk all over again. I now had only light perception in my one remaining eye.

**Kentucky School for the Blind**

There was the problem of attending school. My mother was wise enough to enroll me in the Kentucky School for the Blind in Louisville. I entered in 1925. By the time I was 12 the little light perception I had in my left eye was lost completely.

At the School for the Blind I was a cheerful kid and took to my new environment, my schoolmates, learning Braille, and so on, with great interest and a certain amount of optimism.

My life's vocation all began at 1867 Frankfort Avenue, at the the School for the Blind. There I learned three important things that have remained with me throughout my life. First, I developed a love of good literature. Each evening from 7:00 to 8:00 we had "Big Reading." That meant the older students would be assembled in what we called the Lecture Room and one of the sighted teachers would read good literature to us; such things as David Copperfield, and other Dickens books, *Ivanhoe*, and, *When Knighthood Was in Flower*. This gave me background in a lot of good literature that has stayed with me to this day. I have a great love of good reading.

The second thing the Kentucky School for the Blind taught me was woodworking. They had a very fine instructor in the woodworking shop—manual arts, I guess you would call it today. George Lutz was a sighted man who was a very fine craftsman. He could build things like guitars. Our little woodworking shop was in a small brick building over an old stable. We had a horse named Charlie who used to pull a cart around the grounds. The groundskeeper would



collect grass cuttings, weeds, and leaves with old Charlie. Above old Charlie's stable was our little two-room workshop.

One room was devoted to the blind students who wanted to learn to cane chairs and make brooms and make mops. I told Mr. Lutz when I first entered his classes that I really wasn't interested in that. His favorite expression was, "Aww, gol dingit, boy, if you learn to make brooms and mops and cane chairs you can make a few dollars." I said, "I'd rather work over in that other room where you work and where you have your tools." So he said, "Well if that's what you want, let's see what you can do." So Mr. Lutz took me under his wing and with his tutelage I developed a great love of woodworking and tools.

He had an old treadle-type jigsaw like your mother's old sewing machine. It had no power on it other than your foot power. But the blade jiggled up and down. He would cut metal patterns out and then tack them to plywood and I could follow those metal patterns by keeping the forefinger of my left hand behind the blade and keeping it close to the edge of the metal pattern. I made a number of things under Mr. Lutz's eye and some of those things—ferneries, foot stools, and other items, I have to this day.

In his little shop I learned to measure, saw, cut, sand, drill, and finish. Of course, I didn't do any lacquer or varnish finishing, but I did develop a great deal of woodworking skill that persists to this day. Even in my retirement I'm making miniature bowling alleys, if you can call a 10 and 1/2-foot-long bowling alley miniature.

In addition to love of literature and woodworking, I learned music. Early on in the School for the Blind I learned to play the guitar. Then I played in the band—trumpet, saxophone, and trombone.

I graduated on June 10, 1935. We didn't have much equipment at the school in my day but we had some wonderfully dedicated teachers. We were given some good, sound, basic principles.

## University of Cincinnati

After I graduated from the School for the Blind in 1935 I left Louisville and returned to my home in Park Hills, south of Covington. I entered the University of Cincinnati in September of 1935 and completed my course there, majoring in political science with a minor in mathematics. I wanted to enter their engineering course at the University of Cincinati, but in those days it was unheard of for a person who couldn't see to get into that sort of technical thing. But I did graduate in June of 1940.

## Music Work

I moped around home for quite a while. Of course, keep in mind that I had been in Louisville for 10 years and really didn't have many friends or connections in Covington. Then in early winter of 1941 I received a letter from a classmate of mine, Charles Shinall, saying that he had a little three-piece band and they needed a saxophone player in Louisville and asked me if I was interested. Well, I had borrowed a saxophone from my cousin back when I was in high school and I had it so long I began to think it belonged to me. So I took my borrowed saxophone and about twenty dollars and got on a train and came to Louisville in January of 1941.

I had some pretty tough times for a couple of years. The music job that Charlie mentioned consisted of playing three nights a week at a little honky-tonk down on Second Street between Jefferson and Market called The Merry-Go-Round. The Merry-Go-Round paid each of us three musicians the grand sum of two dollars per night. Plus we had a little cigar box with "Kitty" written on it and occasionally—that was right before the war—the soldiers from Fort Knox would come and drop a few nickels and once in a while a quarter in the kitty. So if we were lucky, after three nights of playing--Friday, Saturday, and Sunday--we might wind up with seven or eight dollars. But that was how I got back to Louisville.



## Courtship and Marriage

There was another reason why I came back to Louisville. It so happened that in 1937 I made some good friends at the School for the Blind who lived in Louisville; one was Jasper Parker by name, and I visited Jasper during the summer of 1937. While there, his sister introduced me to a very interesting and alluring-sounding young woman named Patricia Bothwell. Patricia was 17 and I fell very much in love with her. Over the course of the next four years, from 1937 to 1941, I made a number of trips to Louisville during summer vacations while attending the University of Cincinnati. That was the real reason why I was eager to come back to Louisville after I graduated from UC—so we could date.

My weekly income, as I mentioned, was seven or eight dollars. I got room and board for about five or six. The other couple of bucks I spent on car fare so I could go visit Pat who lived out in Crescent Hill.

We courted for about a year and a half and in May of 1942 we were married. We went back to Covington and were married in my parish Catholic Church, St. Agnes, in Park Hill.

## Vending Stand Work

We returned to Louisville. By that time I was in vending stand work. I was managing a little cubbyhole of a stand at the old Louisville City Hall and I was making about ten or twelve dollars a week. We had saved up sixty dollars in dimes the year-and-a-half we were courting and that is what we started our marriage on. Pat was working in the Munitions Plant over in Charleston, Indiana. She made about twenty-five dollars a week. We had a little third floor apartment at 1122 South Second Street. Those were great days.

In addition to my stand work I played in some small bands. In fact I played with the little group we had on Second Street at a USO over in Jeffersonville, Indiana, twice a week. So we picked up a few extra dollars.

From the City Hall I moved to another stand in late 1942 at WAVE [radio station]. That was a fine building. It was a small stand but I made a lot of good lasting friendships with people at WAVE, for example Mr. George W. Norton, the owner of the radio station.

**Industrial Placement Specialist**

In 1945 I was in the WAVE building vending stand and word came that the State of Ohio was looking for a blind person who had some fairly decent manual skills and could travel to fill a position called Industrial Placement Specialist. This was a new job sponsored jointly by the federal and state governments. The duties of the Industrial Placement Specialist were to contact private industry, make demonstrations on industrial machinery, drill press, lathes, saws, and assembly work of all types, demonstrating to the personnel man, the manager, and the foreman, that they had jobs that could be done without sight. This sounded like something along my line.

By this time I was making a total of about 33 dollars a week and it didn't seem that I had a great future in vending stands in those days. They weren't the fine lucrative stands of today. Anyhow, in December of '45, Pat and I went up to Columbus, state capital of Ohio, and I filled out an application for the Industrial Placement job in Ohio. After we came home Pat developed a serious abdominal condition. She needed an operation and when Ohio gave me a deadline for accepting the job they were offering, I told them that I couldn't leave Kentucky due to my wife's condition at that time.

In the spring of '46, while I was still at the WAVE vending stand, Kentucky finally woke up and set up a position of Industrial Placement. I applied to the people in Rehabilitation who were in charge of appointing a person to fill the position and waited for several months and nothing ever happened. So I went to Mr. Norton, the owner of WAVE who had an office in the building, and explained to him that I was



interested in this position. He was on the board of the Kentucky Society for the Blind, which at this time controlled all the vending stands. And Mr. Norton was a staunch Republican at a time when we had a Republican governor, Simeon S. Willis. So Mr. Norton put in a word for me and kind of stirred 'em up a little bit over in Frankfort. Next thing I knew I was invited to come to Frankfort to be interviewed for the position of Industrial Placement Specialist in Kentucky. I won the position and was sent off to Chicago on April 1 of 1946 for two months of intensive study.

I had always been reluctant to carry a cane. I felt that I could get around without one and did pretty well in Louisville. But when I knew that I was going to Chicago and that we would be learning and working in industries there, I knew I would need to be able to get around safely. So I took a cane. Though I had no instruction in it, I at least had one with me.

**Training in Chicago in Industrial Placement**

When I left Louisville in April of 1946, my wife was pregnant and expecting around the first of June. So I entered the Windy City with a lot of shaking and misgivings. Nevertheless, it was an opportunity to better myself and take care of my soon-to-be-expanded family.

This was the schedule we followed in Chicago: In the mornings we had a discussion group led by two federal instructors who were blind; Jim Hyka and Mr. McCauley. These men's jobs were to come out and to train us in how to talk to prospective sighted employers about accepting blind employees. They drilled us for four hours each morning, and recorded our responses to what they called the "Employers' Objections."

For example, they would say, "Mr. Cox, here is Mr. Jones, employer of XYZ Clothing Company. You are in his office, now, and you're trying to sell him on the fact that he has a job of running a steam press and the first thing Mr. Jones says is, Mr. Cox, we'd like to hire one of your handi-

capped people but we are afraid the insurance company would not allow us to do that."

We learned to tell employers that the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, that carried most of the industrial insurance in the country, would not penalize the employer for any handicap that a blind person had. If he became insured after he was there, the company might be responsible for that. This was how we dealt with one of the 37 "Employers' Objections" we learned by heart and learned how to answer. We rehearsed these sales pitches in the morning.

At noon we had a short lunch break and then went out to private industries. While in Chicago we worked in 20 different industries including Hart, Schaffner & Marx clothiers, Best Foods, a furniture outfit, a metalworking company, laundries, and other types of industries. In each one we learned five different jobs. To demonstrate our speed, we brought firemen to observe us with a stopwatch. This was to see how fast it would take us to come up to the production level required by the plant to meet the daily output.

With these 20 companies and five jobs in each company, at the end of two months we had hands-on experience, working under live conditions at top speed, of how to do 100 different jobs in industry. This was the basis of our training for Industrial Placement.

At the end of the afternoon, at 5:00 p.m., we would grab a quick dinner and report to a vocational training school out in Cicero, Illinois. There, from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. we learned with a sighted machine-shop instructor. He taught us how to operate milling machines, turret lathes, drill presses, surface grinders, standard power hacksaws, and other machine shop equipment. At the end of that eight weeks we had a pretty good working knowledge of how to operate these machines and how to do it safely, how to demonstrate to a sighted person that we could operate a piece of power equipment by keeping our hands in a safe position at all times, that we were not often distracted like sighted



employees are, and that we were concentrating on the job ahead of us.

We had records and statistics to show that blind people, properly placed and trained, were less of a safety risk and better production candidates than the average sighted person. We pointed out that we changed jobs less often than sighted people.

**Birth of Daughter**

On May 20th I received a telegram from my wife who had entered Norton Hospital to give birth. It so happened that at that time there was a railroad strike and no way to get home by train. The planes were so crowded in and out of Chicago that I couldn't get any passage so I simply had to let Pat take care of delivering our fine young daughter, Cathy, on her own. But as soon as I heard that the baby was born safely, mother and daughter doing well, I broke out a bottle of Old Granddad there in Chicago. There were 10 of us in this training course and one fellow from Indiana had an accordion. So we proceeded to celebrate the arrival of my new daughter.

June 1, then, found me returning to Louisville. I had an office at 1510 Heyburn Building from which I would go out every day for the next six years finding jobs for blind people in Louisville and in Kentucky. I had the entire state to cover. Initially, in '46, they had a man in northern Kentucky, one in western Kentucky, and I took care of the central part. But for some reason or other, both of the other two men dropped out of the picture and I inherited the entire state. I covered the state for six years.

During those six years from June of '46 to June of '52 I placed about 100 different blind people in industrial work, in office jobs as typists, as darkroom developers of X-ray films in hospitals, and in other positions. Some of them are still working but most have now retired. That was very interesting work. I started out placing people for the state Department of Rehabilitation for the sum of $230 a month.

**International Harvester**

I placed several people at International Harvester. After about six years of placing people who then made a good deal more money than I did, I decided I'd take a better-paying job. So in 1952 I left state employment and went to International Harvester as a tool grinder. I started there at $80 a week. That looked pretty good. While working for the State I had received a few raises, but was making only $280 a month. I had not received a raise in the last two years. I was a little discouraged, but I can say that I've never done any work that gave me as much satisfaction as convincing a tough-minded employer that he had a job that could be done out in his plant that didn't require sight and then bringing in a capable blind person to that opportunity and seeing them do well on that job.

I picked a bad year, 1952, to go to Harvester because from June of '52 to August of '53 the farm equipment workers were on a tremendous number of strikes. In fact, they were on strike seven out of the 13 months.

During this period I operated a tool-grinding machine at Harvester, grinding crankshaft drills. It was very monotonous but it did put a few more bucks in my billfold on payday. By this time we had moved to the West End at 109 North 46th Street. We bought a small modest home and of course I had a wife and daughter to support. I never believed in my wife working and would rather have her home to help raise our daughter. She felt this way, also.

During the 13 months at Harvester, since I did have the responsibility, we crossed the picket lines and I kept working. But in 1953 Harvester's work had started to slow up. My foreman, who incidentally happened to be a former graduate of the University of Cincinnati engineering school, Ed Price, told me that I'd better start looking for something else because my job was being eliminated.



**Counselor**

Back in 1952, while I was working at Harvester, Dr. Fultz, who was the psychiatrist for the School for the Blind, asked me to work with him to help a very prominent man here in town. He had attempted suicide and succeeded in cutting his optic nerve so he was totally blind. Dr. Fultz asked me to work with him at Our Lady of Peace Hospital to help rehabilitate this man. I did this for about six months, made a little extra money, and had a very interesting experience.

**Out of Work**

August 1 of 1953 found me with a house, a wife and daughter, and no job. My daughter had wanted a life-size doll-house so I took off a month—didn't take off, I had nothing else to do—and built her one. It was about 6 and 1/2 feet tall, 8 and 1/2 feet long and 5 feet front to back. I built it in our back yard and had a lot of fun doing it.

**Manager of Kentucky Workshop for the Adult Blind Under Supervision of the School for the Blind**

While I was in rehabilitation work I had brought several jobs to the workshop at 2007 Frankfort Avenue. This was a small workshop where they made brooms, mops and broom bags. I brought several assembly jobs and several packing jobs which I ran myself, employing some part-time people there. I had good working relations with Mr. Paul J. Langen, Superintendent of Kentucky School for the Blind. He had been after me, during the years I worked with Rehab, to come and run his workshop for him. But I felt I could do better if I went out to International Harvester.

Now, on the last day of August, 1953, I went up to The School for the Blind to see Mr. Langen and asked him if he still needed a Workshop Manager. He said, "Well it's a funny thing you came. Just yesterday I went up to Berea and got a young fellow who's skilled in making brooms—he's a sighted man—to bring him in as manager of the workshop. You know I've been after you for a couple of years to take this

job. I don't know....Are you dead certain this is what you want?" I said, "Yes. I've been away from work for the blind out at Harvester now for 13 months and I realize this is my life work. I like to work with people who have a similar disability as myself. And I like to develop employment opportunities for them." And he said, "Well, if that's the case, let me call the man in Berea and tell him that I've had a change of mind and I have a young blind fellow who wants to manage the workshop."

He did that, and on the first of September I became the Manager of the Adult Workshop for the Blind, which at that time was under the supervision of the Kentucky School for the Blind. I started as manager at the workshop in 1953 for a salary of $300 a month. I had some benefits, a minor retirement plan, and a few sick leave days.

Let me describe what I found at the Kentucky Workshop for the Blind when I went there. We had one elderly bookkeeper, Mrs. Casimer, who had a desk in the front office. On her desk she had a pile of mop yarn. On top of that pile of mop yarn was a big black cat named Hambone. Hambone kept the mice out of the broom corn so Hambone was a privileged character. In addition to Hambone and Mrs. Casimer I had a sighted foreman, Mr. Howard Brown, who had been there as foreman of the workshop since the mid-1930's. We had two part-time truck drivers, Harold Frazier, and Bill Cook. Bill Cook was a partially sighted man. It's a wonder I hadn't been arrested for employing a partially sighted truck driver, but Bill could see well enough to drive. Those two men acted as salesmen and truck drivers for us. That was our staff. Two part-time truck drivers, a foremen, a bookkeeper, and Hambone.

We had 16 blind employees. They worked in terrible conditions and they were all paid the great sum of 50 cents an hour regardless of whether they could produce 12-dozen brooms a day or 6-dozen brooms a day or 2-dozen brooms a day.

It didn't take me long to realize that if I was to stimu-



late production I would need to give them some sort of incentive. So I went to the Personnel Department in Frankfort and explained the situation. I asked if it would be possible for me to find some way of rewarding additional production in our workshop. Of course, the Personnel Department in Frankfort was a bunch of teachers that ran the Department of Education and they were horrified at the idea of incentive pay and differentiating between employees. They were used to employing stenographers, paying them all $120 a month or whatever it was. But after much wheedling I finally got them to agree to keep production records and to pay some bonuses for extra production, for extra number of brooms, or extra number of mops produced.

We had two broom-makers, John Grimes and Charlie Denton. John Grimes could produce about 12-dozen brooms a day and Charlie Denton, although he was a darn good worker and steady as a rock, could only produce at his top speed about 6-dozen per day. With the granting of my incentive plan we paid John 50 cents a dozen for each additional dozen, over six dozen, he could produce.

Up in the mop department we had a man who could produce 30-dozen stick mops a day. I'd pay him a quarter extra for everything over a basic daily quota of 25 dozen. This stepped up production and helped our income.

By the way, our gross sales for 1954, my first year, were $100,000. When I went there the employees were making 50 cents an hour. With my bonus plan, the ones who could produce more, were making something like 80 or 90 cents an hour including their bonus, which was quite an increase for them.

We moved from the west end and bought a house at 188 North Bellaire where we are presently living. I was now two blocks walking distance from the shop.

I found deplorable conditions at the workshop. Our mop department was on the second floor and we had to carry 100-pound bales of mop yarn upstairs by hand. This concerned me very much. I talked to the engineering depart-

ment at Frankfort about installing a freight elevator and they said, Oh no, blind people couldn't ride the elevators. They'd be killed and the State would be sued and it was out of the question.

So I rigged up sort of a chute affair, something like a sliding board, lined it with tin, made a little cart with wheels on it, put a three horse-power motor at the top of the steps and added a rope. On that little cart we loaded a bale of mop yarn and hauled it up that chute. That was one way we had of getting materials up on to the second floor.

Another condition I found when I began work there: I noticed that the women's restroom on the second floor had no door on it. Fifteen men and one woman were employed. Margaret Grasch was the person who sowed mop heads. She was partially sighted. Now up in the mop department on the second floor, of course there was a restroom. The men's restroom was down on the first floor. I asked the foreman, Mr. Brown, why Margaret's restroom did not have a door on it. He said nobody up there could see anyway, and she's the only woman who works on the second floor so they just haven't bothered with it. I said I thought personal dignity ought to be worth something.

So the first job that I did on my own with my own hands at the old Workshop at 2007 Frankfort Avenue was to come up one Sunday and hang a new door on Margaret Grasch's restroom. When I came in to work the next morning—they came to work at 7:00 a.m., I came to work at 8:00 a.m.—she was in my office and wanted to know who put up the door. I said, "Well I felt like you needed some privacy and I put it up over the weekend." I had a friend for life there.

We had no communication system. Whenever Mr. Brown wanted to tell me how much mop yarn or broom corn we needed he had to walk down a number of steps and through quite a hodgepodge of buildings on different levels. On the corner, at 2001 Frankfort, there had been a shoe store, the middle entrance at 2003 and 2005 had been a



theatre, and on the east end, 2007 had been built in 1920 as a manufacturing unit for the Workshop. I soon observed that communication was very bad and put in a little walkie-talkie system. Again, one weekend on my own. I always liked to tinker with something of this type. That saved Mr. Brown, who was up in years at that time, many a step.

**Expansion**

I could see, after being there three or four years, that we couldn't expand very much. We had only about 20,000 square feet in the building. Half of the second floor and half of the first floor were rented out to six tenants. We received about $5-6,000 a year which augmented the sum of the state appropriation in those days that was $20,000 a year in 1954. So $5,000 from rent from tenants was a big item. But I soon saw that by 1955-56 we would need to reclaim the entire building in order to expand. Gradually, I did this. We had a dentist, an engineering outfit, the Rebecca Ruth Candy Company, and the Junior League in there. We had an accounting office on the second floor. Gradually we worked all those out of there and reclaimed the building.

Now what to do with the additional space? In 1956 a couple of things happened. Number one, the State Legislature passed a Bill which separated the Workshop from the School for the Blind and called it the Kentucky Industries for the Blind. I always felt like the word "workshop" had a "sweatshop" connotation. So in 1956 we became the KIB and transferred from the School for the Blind supervision to the State Vocational Rehabilitation Department under the Department of Education.

I had a number of requests from the counselors in the whole Vocational Rehab Department, statewide, for the training of blind people. So we set up two training programs. First was the machine shop training. I hired a machine shop instructor who had taught shop at Manual High School. He was a sighted man.

Then we had a little windfall. The Kentucky Federa-

tion for the Blind, bless their hearts, gave us $2,000 with which we equipped a small machine shop and hired Tony, the machine shop instructor, to teach. We had a class of six to eight trainees and Tony offered them a type of training similar to what I had learned at the vocational school in Cicero. However, our machine shop training for men lasted anywhere from six to eight months. Incidentally, one of our early trainees, about 1957 or '58 was Charles McDowell, who later became State Director of the Bureau for the Blind. Charlie still has a little "Click-o-matic" ruler that he learned to make on a milling machine in our machine shop training.

We set up an industrial training program for women that included various types of sewing. We had a few door-to-door salesmen, and we were selling things like tablecloths and ironing board covers, dust mop heads, and things of this type. In the women's section we taught how to use serging machines (to finish seams), single and double needle machines, and how to make various types of sewing items.

**Sub-Contracting**

We had an interesting way of paying our instructor's salary. Since I couldn't get any money out of the state for his salary, Rehab paid us a training fee. We had to have at least seven people in training at all times in order to pay our instructor's salary. But that's how we did it. From that beginning in 1956 we gradually began to pick up some outside sub-contract work.

We began with folding. Blue Cross had a big policy change and they needed 500,000 envelopes to be stuffed with new policies. We took that on and hired about 35 people—in contrast with the 16 employees that I found there when I began in 1953. These were mostly full-time. Some were part-time people whom we called in as we got various types of jobs. We expanded to the point where I hired Mike Cusig to be in charge of our sub-contract department.

A big shot in the arm for sub-contracting happened in 1960 when we got a letter from a man, Dick Rondy, who was



in charge of production at Seagram's. He wanted to know if we would be interested in assembling some whiskey stoppers. He said that the Workshop for the Blind in Baltimore had done some work for the Baltimore division of Seagram's the year before and wanted to know if we were interested. It so happened in 1960 the shop director's meeting was in Washington, D.C. so I went over to Baltimore to see this job and see what it was like. That's how we got into the whiskey stopper business.

Our peak year was probably 1964. By that time we were working for seven different distilleries and did about seven kinds of stoppers. It was a problem in logistics to get all those glass stoppers and corks assembled in there and get them shipped out. Some days we were running a full trailer-load of stoppers out of there every day. We hired about 50 extra part-time people to do that stopper assembly work. In fact, we loaded so many cases of glass on the second floor we had an outside conveyer belt put in from dock number one, and this conveyer moved the glass stoppers up through a window onto the second floor. We loaded so many cases of glass stoppers on the second floor that the floor started to pull away from the wall. It was about a three-inch gap and the Department of Engineering wanted to condemn the building. I said, "Well, if you want to condemn the building you're going to be responsible for putting out of work maybe 30 full-time people and 30 or 50 part-time people." So they thought better of that. Anyway, we juggled the glass around.

A manufacturing company out in Middletown, run by Skip McMahan, was supplying parts to furniture companies all over America. They were paying six or seven cents per assembly to put chair swivels together. We went out there and demonstrated to them that we could assemble them for about a nickel apiece. They jumped at the chance. They put a couple of big presses in our shop and we set up an assembly line of about eight or 10 people. I took these people from our broom department.

## Closing Broom Department

I noticed through the six years I had been at the shop that we had several people who worked in the broom department develop bronchial asthma. And broom corn is very itchy. In addition, we lost money every year that we made brooms. So in 1960 we closed out the broom department, sold all the broom-making equipment to a fellow down in Nashville, by the name of B.W. Swindle, yes!, who supplied broom bags for us, and we switched those people from the broom department over to the chair swivel line. That worked well for about two years. Of course we were puttting out about a truck load of chair swivels a day. But unfortunately, some manufacturer down in Atlanta underbid Middletown Manufacturing on these chair swivels and they lost the contract so we lost the sub-contract. But by that time we had enough other sub-contracts that we were able to keep the people employed.

## New Building

In 1965 Bert Combs was governor. For the 11 years that I had been manager of the shop I was in the fortunate position that State Rehab wasn't really interested in the Workshop in Louisville. They felt like it was a necessary evil. They had nominal supervision over us. The less they saw of us the better off they felt. So consequently, I dealt directly with State Personnel, State Purchasing, and State Engineering on needs of buying materials, personnel problems, budget, and other matters. Soon I had worked up some pretty good relationships with the state people, more or less bypassing Rehabilitation with their tacit agreement. The Department of Budget, about 1964, said that they were getting out a $170 million bond issue. They needed an appealing project to get this passed. I heard about this and contacted Bill Tyler, an architect in town. We had some preliminary sketches and cost figures put together.

We went to the Division of Budget—happened to hit 'em at the right time—and asked for $550,000 with which to



build a new Kentucky Industries for the Blind. The Budget Department jumped at the chance of putting our recipient request as their first state agency that would benefit from it. The blind people, don't you know, get a new workshop. So it was good for the bond appeal and of course it was good for KIB. In 1966, that bond issue was passed and we got the $550,000.

Now we had to find a place to put the building. We looked at locations. For instance, there was a lumber yard out in the middle of St. Matthews, the Kentucky Lumber Co. But they wanted too much money. There were seven acres out on Poplar Level Road but that was too far and didn't have a rail siding. By then L.P. Howser had just become Superintendent of the School for the Blind. Mr. Langen, my boss, had moved on to the American Foundation for the Blind in New York in 1956. Howser and I were in the Lions together and became good friends. He said, "If you're looking for a place to put the building why don't you put it on the back of our lot, facing Brownsboro Road?"

I remembered from my school days that there used to be an old pond down there with seven or eight feet of water standing in it. We got some surveyors to look at it and they said this water could be drained and we'd have to put in several hundred cubic yards of fill. But it could be made a good site. Well, the upshot was that this all took a lot of time and we had to rehash different things.

Ben Coffman, who was Director of State Rehab at that time, wanted a new Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in addition to the Industries. The State Rehab had been sending their blind trainees to Arkansas and other places for mobility and demands of daily living training, so he wanted to set up this facility in Kentucky. We put that on the second floor of the building and of course State Rehab wanted to call it the Rehab Center for the Blind.

The main reason why we got the $550,000 was to have an expanded Kentucky Industries for the Blind. This was my first love. Then we wouldn't have to carry mop yarn to

the second floor and do everything the hardest and toughest way as we had to do up on Frankfort Avenue. I wanted to lay out a modern one-floor plant that had adequate loading docks and facilities and so on for the employees where we all could be proud for them to work.

I had quite a tussle with State Rehab but we did get some State Rehab money as well as some federal money. We got a package of about $1,100,000 to build and equip this building at 1900 Brownsboro Road. So I agreed that we would put a small sign on the front of the building with Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, but my friend Bill Tyler, who had been sold--after many sessions with me--that the big need was employment for the blind, had already manufactured and processed the big sign, KENTUCKY INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND, that you see on the lawn out there! So he put that big aluminum-lettered sign up. When we answered the phone it was "Kentucky Industries for the Blind." Of course I understand that now it's Department for the Blind, but anyhow I had to fight tooth and toenail to maintain the Industries' identity.

My point for maintaining my position was that in the 60's and early 70's, we had to generate all of the salaries of the hourly employees plus some of the salaries of the foremen. We had to pay for all of the material. This money had to be generated by the sale of our manufactured products and our resales and sub-contracts. I always said that KIB in those days was about 60 to 70% self-sufficient and if we were to maintain covering those costs we had to maintain the industry's identity.

It worked. In February, 1970, the building was completed and we made the great move from Frankfort Avenue down to Brownsboro Road. We got new equipment. Brand, spanking new virtually everything and we were off and running. We accepted our first training class at the Rehab Center upstairs in March of 1970 and I was made Director of both the Industries and the Rehab Center. We were expanding and I hired an assistant to go out and find sub-contract



work. I worked with him quite a bit and we expanded the sub-contract department. We developed a lot of good contacts with companies in town. I understand many of these companies are no longer in existence.

**Retirement**

I retired on November 1, 1979, as Director of Kentucky Industries for the Blind due to poor health. I had developed a muscle skin disorder that has a big long fancy name. It has limited me as far as working conditions and use of my muscles. I do work three or four hours a day here in my shop here at home building bantam bowling alleys about 1/5 the size of a standard alley. I've made and sold about 17 or 18 in the last eight years. Sold them to schools for the blind and to cerebal palsy schools, individuals, training centers, and so on. Light wood-working is a hobby; an avocation.

Now looking back over my working years, several other thoughts come to mind that are important. The first two are about Management Training and Lions Club activities. The third is about the quality of perseverance.

**Management Training**

In 1955, Paul Langen, my boss and Supertintendent at the School for the Blind, thought it would be a good move for me to do a couple of things. First, take a Management Development Course at night school at the University of Louisville, which I did. I got a degree in that and learned how to handle personnel problems, industrial problems, financial matters, materials, and all that any modern manager has to deal with.

In those days I was the whole show as far as management, purchasing agent, personnel, and all that. As we grew at 1900 Brownsboro Road we were able to add additional people.

## Lions Club

Secondly, Mr. Langen suggested that a good service club connection might help me. So Finis Davis, Superintendent of the American Printing House for the Blind, sponsored me as a member of downtown Louisville Lions Club in January 1955. This makes me a member of about 32 years' standing this year [1987].

As a Lion, I was immediately put on the Sight Conservation Committee. Harry Finks was chairman of the committee, and we saw the need for an eye clinic. Dr. Finks gave his time and we helped develop some publicity, brochures and financing and started the old Eye Clinic in 1956. In '58 we expanded it to the Louisville Eye Bank. It is still a project of our own Club. We started having corneas done, and so on. Our first little office area was located in the old Medical School at First and Chestnut in the basement.

A funny story from that building: One night we were down there for a meeting. Art Rosenbaum, who was vice president of Louisville Gas & Electric, was on the Board of our Eye Bank and Eye Clinic. During a meeting there we had a power failure. All of them sat there and groaned. Art said, "How in the hell are we going to get out of here, Ned?" I said, "Art, hang on to my shoulders and I'll lead you out of here." He often told that story and got a big kick out of it.

Then from the old Medical School we moved over into the Eye Institute. I was a charter member of the Board of Trustees with the Eye Foundation. I went through that fund-raising campaign. I was president, 1965, of the downtown Louisville Lions Club. That year our club donated $30,000 to the building fund.

I also was named the Lions Director of the Eye Bank from 1958 until about 1975. My job was to handle publicity, posters, all Eye Bank pledge cards, and thank you letters to donors. All of that was under my jurisdiction and I handled it for about 16 years.



## Holloran Trust Fund

When I retired from KIB I felt like I wouldn't be able to still be a trustee so I resigned from the Board of Trustees. We saw the founding of the Eye Bank, the establishment of the building and the growth of the Institute to what it is today.

Back in 1966, the Foundation was approached by a couple of lawyers from California who were representing the John Holloran Trust Fund. John Holloran had been a brick and stone mason here in Louisville and made a good deal of money. He wound up in California. He died and left a $200,000 estate. He specified that the proceeds and annual interest from the trust fund were to meet the needs of indigent blind people who lived in Louisville and its environs. The Will stipulated that this money could not be administered by any state agency. So the Printing House for the Blind was contacted, as was the School for the Blind, Recording for the Blind, and the Industries for the Blind. But state agencies or semi-governmental agencies could not administer this trust fund.

So finally the Eye Foundation appointed a sub-committee that represented a dozen or so Lions Clubs in this area to form the John Holloran Trust Fund Committee. Initially we received eight or nine thousand a year. Now it's more than that. But our money accumulated over the years.

## Housing for Trainees

L.P. Howser, superintendent of the school at the time, and I had felt from early Rehab days that there needed to be some sort of housing facility for blind trainees in this Crescent Hill area. One day in 1968 we were walking down Coral Avenue and saw a For Sale sign at 113 Coral. We went in and talked to the caretaker there. It was an old three-story house in good condition. We recommended to the Holloran Trust Fund Committee that we purchase this house for $12,000, renovate it, and furnish it with funds solicited from all the Lions Clubs in our area. L.P. Howser was chairman

of the Trust Committee at that time.

Each Club furnished a different room; altogether it was about $6,000. We had little plaques put on the doors telling which Lions Clubs in our area helped furnish each room. It opened about 1968 to provide housing for trainees from out in the state. Our Holloran Committee furnished bed and board and hired a housekeeper.

Our first house, at 113 Coral, accommodated 10 people but the demand grew so much that we bought another house at 117 Coral Avenue and hired a second housekeeper. At one time we had housing capacity for 20 blind trainees here in Louisville.

The Holloran Trust Committee filled other unique needs that none of the state agencies could meet. For example, if a blind person is indigent and has a refrigerator or stove go out, Holloran can replace it. It can provide clothing, transportation, and assistance with medical costs. We've helped set people up in business. A great deal has been accomplished when the blind person meets the criteria for receiving financial aid from the Holloran Trust.

**Organizing Louisville East Lions Club**

Another thing I'm very proud of: In about 1979 I was instrumental in organizing a new Lions Club in the Crescent Hill area of Louisville. L. John, who was president of our Club at that time asked me if there was a need for a Lions Club in this area and I said I think there is. He said, "There are a lot of blind people there, why don't you form a blind Lions Club?" I said, "Well, going back to our placement days, one of the cardinal principles is that we were never to congregate a big gaggle of blind people in one area and say, 'This is our blind department.' The individual is not accepted by sighted people if you segregate him. He needs to be integrated with sighted people. So I told that same story to L. John and he said he could see the reason for that. I said there were some blind people I'd like to recommend. I said, "Let's make it a Crescent Hill Lions Club and I'll recommend



some blind members. But let's have basically a sighted club. I think that will give wider scope for activities."

I personally contacted every member of that original club. There were 35 in that club. We had Charter Night, April of 1979, and chartered the Club. They've been very active in the Crescent Hill area. One of their past presidents has been Bill Roby who runs the "Convenient" store right across from the Workshop for the Blind. At present, the Superintendent of the School for the Blind, Will Evans, one of his right hand men, and several of his teachers are members of Louisville East. Ed Womack, a blind person who was a vending stand operator in Frankfort, is the current president of Louisville East Lions Club [1987].

**Perseverance**

I put more of my life's work in the Industries than I had anywhere else. My philosophy from a kid on has been that you can do most things you want to do if you've got enough determination and if you've got enough stick-to-itiveness to persevere with it.

I remember a story about the first man that I placed at C.T. Dearing Printing Company at 11th and Broadway years ago. A fellow named Bert Ellis. I called on that company religiously every month for about almost two years and never could get in. They taught us in Chicago in our training for industrial placement work, always go to the top man of the company. He is the one who can say yes. If you have his blessing you'll get something done. Finally I got in to see Mr. Billy Reed who was in charge of C.T. Dearing. I don't know whether I just happened to catch him in or the secretary felt good that day and actually let me in to talk with him. He and I became good friends and he referred me to Bob Clark who was the personnel man.

Bob said, "Well, Mr. Cox, I don't know that we've got anything in here that can be done without sight. We print magazines, as you know." And I said, "Why don't you and I walk through the plant. You describe the various operations.

And if we find a possibility, let me try it." So we did that. We were going by a conveyer belt and I said, "Bob, what's this?" He said, "Well this is a trimming machine operation." I said, "Well, what does that consist of?" He said, "The operator has a skid of bundles of magazines behind him. He turns around, picks up a bundle, lays it on a belt conveyer between two upright pegs on that conveyer. The conveyer then puts it into a cutting machine, and that trims off the excess margin of paper around the magazine."

I said, "That doesn't sound like it requires sight. You have to know where to put that on the conveyer. Would there be such a thing as getting your rhythm and timing and so synchronizing your movements with the belt so you can lay them in there?" He said, "I never thought about that. Let's see. We've got a union in here and I'll have to see if we can get one of these union guys to step down."

I said, "Let me try the operation." So he let me try it and it wasn't but a few minutes and it was duck soup. All you had to do was time your movements so you could lay that bundle in there. And you know, as a result of that initial plant survey—going through looking at jobs and trying them out and trying to convince management that you can do them—that I wound up placing eight different people there. Some of them worked there for years and years.

That's the kind of persistence and just sheer bull-headedness, I guess, that had got me some successes. I am pretty tenacious and if I think something is worth selling, like blind labor or capabilities of blind people, I'm pretty hard to stop.

When I left The Kentucky School for the Blind we had about 50 employees on our rolls, about 35 permanent and 15 or 20 part-time. Our annual sales had gone to around $750,000-$800,000. I was also proud that our State Appropriation jumped from $20,000 a year in 1954 to about $300,000 in 1979. In fact, the year before I left I had put in a request for a big salary increase for staff. The next budget after I left, the 1980 budget, was around $360,000 or



$380,000. I understand now [1987] that top wages for hourly workers are around $6 an hour with good benefits.

**The Ned Cox Student Fund**

In 1980 Ed recommended that they establish a Ned Cox Student Fund at Kentucky School for the Blind. The purpose of this fund was to meet individual needs of indigent blind students such as for clothing, transportation or medical care. Just this week I had a call about a young blind student there who needs dental work. Front teeth are in bad shape and he needs a lot of dental work.

Louisville East Lions appropriated $200 additionally for the Ned Cox Student Fund at KSB. This has grown into annual expenditure for the Ned Cox Fund for blind students exclusively, anywhere from $700 to $1,000 a year. Other donations have been given to the Ned Cox Fund and I'm very proud of that because I guess we are all vain enough to like to have something remain after we leave.

**Chapter in *From the Fortress to the Future: Kentucky Education***

Alice McDonald, of the Department of Education, is putting out a little publication this spring [1987] called *From the Fortress to the Future:Kentucky Education.* It traces the whole history of education. They asked me to write a chapter on my experiences at the Kentucky School for the Blind. They particularly wanted humorous things, so I wrote them a chapter called "School Days at Kentucky School for the Blind." That may come out in the spring. I hope it does. I've got some funny incidents in there. I developed some wonderful friendships and lifelong contacts at the School for the Blind that stood me in great stead. [The book was published later in 1987.]

## Growing Family and Wedding Anniversaries

In 1970, Cathy presented us with a very fine granddaughter, Jennifer Cody and in 1973, a fine grandson Paul Cody. Jennifer now is 22 and has a little two-year-old daughter of her own. She is the pride and joy of the Cox-Cody clan. Her name is Katie Cody. She refers to yours truly as Papaw. She's quite the apple of our eyes. Paul is now 19. By the way, this weekend he visited us from St. Louis with his girlfriend, Jenny, from a small college. Both of them are freshmen. Paul is a fine, tall young basketball player. A handsome son-of-a-gun. And we are very proud of both of those grandchildren. Our son-in-law, Dick Cody, Cathy's husband, manages some greenhouses in St. Louis. He has a Master's Degree in horticulture from UK and they're all doing very well. We miss them very much and even though St. Louis is only 270 miles away it seems to be enough of a barrier that we don't get to see them as often as we like.

In 1987, our daughter arranged for a surprise 45th anniversary party at our church, St. Frances of Rome. She invited more than 100 of our friends and family and we had a nice catered buffet in the cafeteria plus a real nice jazz band. They played tunes of our vintage and things we used to dance to years ago. I enjoyed dancing with my bride of 45 years. On May 30, 1992, we went to St. Louis to be with Cathy, Dick, Jennifer, Paul, and Katie to celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary. They took us out to a nice neighborhood restaurant where they played all the appropriate anniversary songs—things that are very nostalgic—almost bring a tear to your eye after 50 years. But we enjoyed celebrating that anniversary with them there in St. Louis.



## Awards

### *Melvin P. Jones Fellowship Award*

In January of 1993 the State Lions had a meeting here and presented to me what is called the Melvin P. Jones Fellowship Award. Melvin Jones started the Lions Clubs back in 1920. This Fellowship Award is for outstanding service to blind people. The international vice president presented me with a very nice plaque, together with a little ruby lapel pin. My Club had to make a donation to the International Lions of $1,000 for me to get this Award and I feel very honored that it was presented to me.

### *The Paul J. Langen Distinguished Service Award*

On May 10, 1993, the Kentucky School for the Blind had a Founder's Day meeting at which they presented an award called the Paul J. Langen Distinguished Service Award. Paul J. Langen was a very progressive Superintendent of the School for the Blind from 1945 to 1956. Mr. Langen is the one who hired me in 1953 to manage the Kentucky Workshop for the Blind. The first year of the award [1992] they presented it to Mr. Langen himself. He is now 86 years old and lives in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I am the first blind person to receive the award. I feel honored it was presented to me. My daughter, granddaughter, and great granddaughter came from St. Louis. My lifelong friend, Jack Rolfes, and his wife , came from Cincinnati. My cousin and his wife came from LaGrange to with be us at the presentation on Founder's Day, May 10 of this year.

Imogene Bradley, a former teacher of music at the School for the Blind, presented a sketch of my life; a history gathered principally from this tape. It was a very nice affair and I feel very honored that they would have chosen me as the first blind person to receive this award.

I guess that's about the size of my history. I've talked and rambled a lot in this thing.

My first goal, as you've gathered from this autobiography, is finding employment for blind people. I think you can give them all the fancy training for computer and so on, and at the end of that training, if it doesn't result in a paycheck for that blind trainee, then you really haven't helped them a whole hell of a lot.